THE LINCOLN AND DOUGLAS DEBATES

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By

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THE LINCOLN AND DOUGLAS DEBATES

The subject of this lecture is the Lincoln and Douglas debates. These debates took place in the year 1858. They grew out of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Doubtless some of you know what the Missouri Compromise was and others do not. It is best that all should know, since without such knowledge the debates themselves would have little meaning for you. Fifty-six years have passed since those debates took place. One hundred and ten years have passed since President Jefferson bought Louisiana from Napoleon Bonaparte. Missouri Territory was a part of the Louisiana Purchase. Without that purchase there would have been no Missouri Compromise, and no repeal of it in 1854, and no Lincoln and Douglas debates on account thereof.

But there was a remoter and deeper cause for that encounter. President Jefferson might have bought Louisiana with its vast hinterland, and his successors might have carved Missouri out of it and admitted her to the Union as a state, without any disturbance, had not African slavery existed in this country. That direful curse was ingrafted upon us in the year 1619 at Jamestown, Virginia, where a Dutch warship, short of provisions, exchanged fourteen negroes for a supply thereof. Few persons of the present day realize how shocking a condition of society slavery was. It was a condition in which some millions of human beings had no rights whatsoever, among whom the marriage relation

did not exist, and where the privilege of virtue was denied to women. This institution was common to all the American colonies until the end of the Revolutionary War. Then began an emancipation movement of which Thomas Jefferson was the most ardent and influential advocate. He did not, however, gain sufficient support for it in Virginia or in Maryland to abolish slavery there, but in all the states north of Maryland measures were initiated for that purpose before the end of the eighteenth century.

After the emancipation movement came to a pause, at the southern border of Pennsylvania, the fact became apparent that there was a dividing line between free states and slave states, and a feeling existed in both sections that neither of them ought to acquire a preponderance of power and mastery over the other. The slavery question was not then an issue in politics, but a habit grew up of admitting new states to the Union in pairs, in order to maintain a balance of power in the national Senate. Thus Kentucky and Vermont offset each other, then Tennessee and Ohio, then Louisiana and Indiana, then Mississippi and Illinois.

In 1819 Alabama, a new slave state, was admitted to the Union and there was no free state to balance it. The territory of Missouri, in which slavery existed, also was applying for admission. While Congress was considering the Missouri bill, Mr. Talmadge of New York, with a view to preserving the balance of power, offered an amendment providing for the gradual emancipation of slaves in the proposed state, and prohibiting the introduction of additional slaves. This amendment was adopted by the House by a sectional vote, nearly all the northern members voting for it and the southern ones against it, but it was rejected by the Senate.

In the following year the Missouri question came up afresh and Senator Thomas of Illinois proposed, as a compromise, that Missouri should be admitted to the Union with slavery, but that in all the remaining territory north of 36°30′ north latitude slavery should be forever prohibited. This amendment was adopted and the bill was passed. The Missouri Compromise was generally considered a victory for the South, but Thomas Jefferson considered it the death knell of the Union. He was still living, at the age of seventy-seven. He saw what this sectional rift portended, and he wrote to John Holmes, one of his correspondents, under date of April 22, 1820:

> This momentous question, like a fire bell in the night, awakened me and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the Union. It is hushed, indeed, for the moment. But this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence. A geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper.

In short, there was already an irrepressible conflict in our land. There was a fixed opinion in the North that slavery was an evil which ought not to be extended and enlarged. There was a growing opinion in the South that such extension was a vital necessity and that the South, in contending for it, was contending for existence. The prevailing thought in that quarter was that the southern people were on the defensive, that they were resisting aggression. In this feeling they were sincere and they gave expression to it in very hot temper.

Two treaties with Mexico following the war with that country in 1846–48 brought into our possession, partly by conquest and partly by purchase, the territory now embraced in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and California. Slavery did not exist in any part of this region,

having been abolished and prohibited by the constitution of Mexico, but as it had been introduced into Texas in spite of the local law, public sentiment in the North was keenly alive to the danger of a similar result elsewhere. So when a bill came before Congress in 1846 to appropriate money preliminary to the first treaty, a proviso was moved by Mr. Wilmot, of Pennsylvania, to the effect that neither slavery nor involuntary servitude should ever exist in any territory to be thus acquired. The House promptly adopted it but it was rejected by the Senate, and the fight over the Wilmot Proviso continued for several years. Abraham Lincoln was a member of Congress during two of those years and he voted for the Wilmot Proviso in one form or another about forty times.

The discovery of gold in California in 1848 caused such a rush of immigrants to the Pacific Coast that, while Congress was still wrangling over the Wilmot Proviso and the spoils of the Mexican War, the new settlers in California came together in June, 1849, formed a state constitution prohibiting slavery, and applied for admission to the Union. Here was an accomplished fact, which could not be ignored or postponed. Henry Clay brought forward a series of bills, which, when finally passed, became known as the Compromise Measures of 1850. They included, among other things, the admission of California as a free state and the organization of all the other territory in dispute, without either the prohibition or the admission of slavery therein. It was Mr. Clay's opinion that slavery was already prohibited there by the law of Mexico. It was Mr. Webster's opinion that it was prohibited also by the law of nature; that is, by climate and topographical conditions.

The Compromise Measures of 1850 were assumed by all political parties to be a final settlement of the slavery question as far as Congress was concerned. The Demo-

crats carried the presidential election of 1852, and the incoming president, Franklin Pierce, in his first message to Congress, declared that the repose which those measures had brought to the public councils should not be disturbed during his term of office, if he had power to prevent it. This was a vain conception, for within sixty days thereafter he had agreed to support a bill to repeal the Missouri Compromise. This agreement was made at the instance of Senator Douglas of Illinois, supported by Jefferson Davis, secretary of war, at an interview in the White House on Sunday, January 22, 1854.

Douglas was then forty-one years of age. He had been in Congress ten years and had reached the foremost place there, his great predecessors, Webster, Clay, Calhoun, and John Quincy Adams, having just passed away. Born in Vermont in 1813, he had drifted westward at the age of twenty to seek his fortune. He effected lodgment at Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1833. Nobody ever began the battle of life in humbler surroundings or with smaller pecuniary resources. Yet his advance was so rapid that it seemed as though he had only to ask anything from his fellow-citizens in order to have it given to him more abundantly than he desired. He had filled the offices of State's Attorney, Member of the Legislature, Secretary of State, Judge of the Supreme Court, Representative in Congress, and Senator of the United States, and had been a formidable candidate for the presidency in the Democratic National Convention of 1852 which nominated Pierce. In the Democratic party he had forged to the front by virtue of boldness in leadership, untiring industry, boundless ambition and self-confidence, engaging manners, great capacity as a party organizer, and unsurpassed powers as an orator and debater. He had a large head, surmounted by an abundant mane, which gave the appearance of a lion prepared to roar or crush his

prey, and the resemblance was not seldom confirmed when he opened his mouth on the stump or in the Senate chamber. Although patriotic beyond a doubt, he was color blind to moral principles in politics, and if not stone blind to the evils of slavery was deaf and dumb to any expression concerning them. In stature he was only five feet four inches high, but he had earned the title of "Little Giant" before he ever held a public office, and he kept it undisputed till the day of his death. When he began his public career he had for competitors and rivals in his near neighborhood, Abraham Lincoln, Lyman Trumbull, Edward D. Baker, O. H. Browning, Richard Yates, and several other men who gained national reputation and position, all of whom he distanced in the race for preferment up to the time when he linked his fortunes with the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. In 1854 he filled the public eye in larger measure than any other American, not excepting President Buchanan. He was the only man then living who could have carried that measure through Congress. He was the only northern man who would have had the audacity to propose it. Nor would any southern statesman have ventured to take such a step then if he had not led the way.

On the 5th of December, 1853, Senator Dodge, of Iowa, introduced a bill to organize the Territory of Nebraska, embracing all the unorganized country west of the state of Missouri and north of 36°30′ north latitude. It said nothing about slavery. It was referred to the Committee on Territories, of which Douglas was chairman. Douglas reported it back with an amendment providing "that all questions pertaining to slavery in the territories, and in the new states to be formed therefrom are to be left to the decision of the people residing therein through their appropriate representatives." In a report accompanying the bill he said:

Stephen Arnold Douglas

From a photograph supposed to have been made in 1858

The principles established by the Compromise Measures of 1850, so far as they are applicable to territorial organizations, are proposed to be affirmed and carried into practical operation within the limits of the new territory.

This was an unexpected revelation and a very startling one to the people of the free states, who had never imagined that the Compromise of 1850 reached backward as well as forward so as to render the Missouri Compromise of 1820 nugatory and void. Yet a careful reading of Douglas' amendment shows that it did not repeal the Missouri Compromise, for it did not open the door to the admission of any slaves. It was merely a provision that if the people of the territory should ask to be admitted to the Union as a slave state, without ever having had a slave in their borders, they should be allowed to come in. It was hardly possible that such a thing could happen.

Senator Dixon of Kentucky, the successor of Henry Clay, saw the point at once. He moved an amendment to Douglas' bill so as to repeal the Missouri Compromise outright and admit slavery to the new territory if any slave-owners desired to carry them there. Douglas was disconcerted by this motion. He went to Dixon's seat and urged him to withdraw it, saying that it would most probably defeat the bill and prevent the organization of the territory altogether. Dixon was inflexible. Douglas hesitated a few days but finally accepted Dixon's amendment, and after a desperate struggle in Congress and amid intense excitement throughout the country it eventually passed both houses and was approved by President Pierce.

When the bill actually became a law there was a political explosion in every northern state. The old parties were rent asunder and a new one began to form in order to prevent the extension of slavery into the new territories. Abraham Lincoln was at this time a country lawyer in

816479

Springfield, Illinois, with a not very lucrative practice, but he was a very popular story-teller. In fact, he was not exactly the leader of the bar. To reach the front rank in the legal profession one must give his undivided attention and best energies to it. Lincoln never did so. He was, first of all, a politician, using this phrase in its best sense—a man absorbed in the contemplation of public affairs and the desire to participate therein. He had been a member of Congress one term, but in 1854 he was practically shelved, without a hope of obtaining any higher place than the one he had filled last, or even of obtaining that one again. He belonged to the Whig party, which was the minority party in Illinois. He had followed Clay and Webster in supporting the Compromise Measures of 1850, including the fugitive slave law of that period, for although a hater of slavery he believed that the Constitution required the extradition of slaves escaping into the free states.

He was startled by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Without that awakening, which came like an electric shock to all the northern states, he would doubtless have remained in comparative obscurity. He would have continued riding the circuit in central Illinois, making a scanty living as a lawyer, entertaining tavern loungers with funny stories, and would have passed away unhonored and unsung. He was now roused to new activity. For the first time the thought broke upon him that this country could not permanently endure half slave and half free. He enunciated it to a friend and fellow-circuit-rider, Mr. T. Lyle Dickey, shortly after the news arrived of the passage of the Nebraska bill. Dickey persuaded him not to give public expression to that thought at present, since Douglas and his supporters would construe it as a hope that the free states might be separated from the slave states and the Union come to an end. Lincoln promised to be careful of

his words for the time being; but to his partner, Herndon, he said that the day of compromise had now passed, that either slavery or freedom must conquer, that they were deadly antagonists which had thus far been held apart, but that some day they would break their bonds and come to a death grapple, and then the great question would be settled.

Douglas' Nebraska bill was based upon the principle of "popular sovereignty" or "sacred right of self-government" or "right of the people to govern themselves"—three names for the same thing. Yet it was not a new thing. It had been expounded by General Cass, the Democratic nominee for president in 1848. It was then termed "squatter sovereignty." "Popular sovereignty" was a more orotund phrase and Douglas was a more orotund speaker than Cass. He made such skilful and incessant use of it and rang so many changes on it, that he finally called it "my great principle" and led many unthinking people to believe, not merely that he had been the first to apply it to our outlying territories, but that he was the original inventor of it as a form of human government. It constituted the backbone, the *pièce de résistance*, of his speeches in Congress and everywhere, including the joint debates with Lincoln.

Obviously the first thing to be done in any controversy with him touching the Nebraska bill would be to expose the *ignis fatuus* of Popular Sovereignty.

The Lincoln and Douglas debates, as commonly understood, are those of 1858, seven in number, when the two champions were candidates for the United States Senate. But in fact, the debates of 1858 were only a continuation of the debate between the same champions in 1854, when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise was a fresh subject of dispute and when the political elements from which the Republican party was cast were in the boiling and bubbling

stage. It was my good fortune to hear the debates of both years.

Douglas came home in September, 1854, to defend his course in repealing the Missouri Compromise. He first made an attempt to do so at Chicago but the people were intensely hostile to him and literally hooted him from the platform. His next appearance was at Springfield, October 3, where the state fair was in progress. He spoke in the Representative hall of the state house. His speech was, for the most part, a repetition of his arguments in the Senate on the Nebraska bill, a seductive presentation of the doctrine of Popular Sovereignty, and an attempt to show that the Missouri Compromise had been repealed in principle by the Compromise Measures of 1850.

On the following day Lincoln replied to Douglas in the same hall (Douglas himself being present) in a great speech, one of the world's masterpieces of argumentative power and moral grandeur. This was the first speech made by him that gave a true measure of his qualities. It was the first public occasion that laid a strong hold upon his conscience and stirred the depths of his nature. It was the first speech of his that I was privileged to hear. I was then twenty years of age. The impression made upon me was overwhelming and it has lost nothing by the lapse of time. I have read it often since, and always with thankfulness that we had the right man in the right place at that critical juncture, to uphold the banner of righteousness and make a rallying-point for the lovers of freedom in the Northwest. It was a profoundly serious speech. The thought impressed upon its hearers was their solemn responsibility to God and man and future generations, to uphold the principles of free government, without flinching or doubting or wavering. In the whole twenty-nine pages of the speech there is not a line of levity, nothing to provoke a smile, although

Mr. Lincoln was an unrivaled master of humor on all proper occasions. He was at this time forty-five years of age, at the prime of life, at the maturity of his powers. He never made a better speech than this one, although the Cooper Institute speech is on the same plane with it. Of the latter Horace Greeley said that it was the greatest speech he had ever listened to, although he had heard several of Webster's best. In Mr. Lincoln's complete writings the speech we have been considering is styled the Peoria speech, because it was delivered at Peoria twelve days later, and soon afterward published from his own manuscript, although he did not use any notes whatever when speaking.

Before coming to the joint debates of 1858, I will briefly note Mr. Lincoln's answer to Douglas' Popular Sovereignty dogma, or "sacred right of self-government." He said that the right of self-government was absolutely and eternally right but that whether it included the right to hold negroes as slaves in Nebraska, or anywhere, depended upon whether a negro was, or was not, a man. If he was not a man, he might be reduced to servitude without any violation of the doctrine of self-government; but if he was a man, he, too, had the right to govern himself. To deny him that right was a total destruction of the doctrine of self-government. "If it is a sacred right for the people of Nebraska," he added, "to take and hold slaves there, it is equally their sacred right to buy them where they can buy them cheapest, and that will undoubtedly be on the coast of Africa, provided you consent not to hang men for going there to buy them." In his later debates Mr. Lincoln applied to this Popular Sovereignty humbug a more crisp, sententious definition, saying it meant that "if A wanted to make a slave of B, no third man had a right to object."

Between the debates of 1854 and those of 1858 two things of importance occurred. One was the Kansas war between

the Free State men and the Pro-slavery men. Included in this strife were the raids of non-residents, commonly called "border ruffians," from Missouri into Kansas, to seize the ballot boxes and control the elections. The other was the attempt of the Pro-slavery party in 1857 to get Kansas admitted to the Union as a state under the Lecompton Constitution, without submitting it to the people for ratification or rejection. In this attempt President Buchanan sided with the Lecomptonites, although he had assured the governor of the territory, Robert J. Walker, that the Constitution should be so submitted. Douglas took the contrary view and insisted that the Constitution ought to be submitted to the vote of the people at a fair election, and that any different course would be a barefaced fraud upon Kansas, and a national crime. To this position he adhered in spite of the whole power of the administration, but he said repeatedly that he cared not whether slavery was voted up or voted down. His opposition to the Lecompton measure did not change the majority in the Senate, but it did have that effect in the House. It killed Lecompton. His course in this matter was so great a reinforcement to the Republicans—it took such a burden of apprehension and dread off their minds, and it held out such promise of future assistance—that the leaders of the party in the eastern states, including Seward and Greeley, strongly favored the policy of joining forces to re-elect Douglas, whose senatorial term was about to expire. The Republicans of Illinois, however, did not think that Douglas could be trusted under all possible circumstances. They had to judge of his future course by his past, and they accordingly rejected the advice of their eastern friends and nominated Lincoln as their candidate for the Senate. If they had followed the advice of their eastern friends, the Lincoln and Douglas debates of 1858 would never have taken place, Lincoln would not

Springfield, July 31. 1858

Hon. S. A. Douglas

Dear Sir

Yours of yesterday, naming places, times, and terms, for joint discussion between us was received this morning— Although, by the terms, as you propose, you take four openings and closes to my three, I accede and thus close the arrangement— I direct this to you at Hillsboro; and shall try to have both your letter and this, appear in the Journal and Register of Monday morning—

Your Obt. Servt.

A. Lincoln—

[INDORSEMENT]

July 31.

A Lincoln
Springfield
Ill.

Accepts challenge for
joint Discussion

have been brought into the limelight and made a presidential possibility in 1860, and the whole course of history would have been changed. Douglas was the cynosure of all eyes then. The people of distant states and communities came to know Lincoln, not because of his own merits, but because he was pitted against Douglas. Few persons outside of Illinois supposed that he would stand up long under the blows of his expert and hard-hitting antagonist.

The debates of 1858 were the result of a challenge given by Lincoln to Douglas to divide the time and address the people from the same platform throughout the campaign. Douglas hesitated about accepting the challenge. His friends urged him to decline it, not because they feared that Douglas would be worsted in the encounter, but because his greater fame would draw crowds of people who would otherwise never hear Lincoln at all. This was quite true. Although Douglas is now remembered chiefly because of his association with Lincoln, the case was far different then.

Douglas, however, did not dare to refuse the challenge. If he had refused, the Republicans would have said that he was afraid to meet Lincoln on the stump, and there would have been a modicum of truth in the statement. He therefore accepted the challenge but he limited it to seven debates in the whole state.

The main issue of the campaign was the extension of slavery to new territory. Lincoln's contention was that it ought not to be extended. Why ought it not to be extended? Because it was wrong *per se* and because it kept the country in a constant broil and strife and tended to disrupt the Union. At the convention where Lincoln was nominated for senator he read a brief speech from manuscript. It was a calm, dispassionate argument. At or near the beginning of it he used the words which have been so often

quoted: "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other," etc. He then proceeded to show the steps taken during recent years to make slavery a national instead of a local institution by means of the Nebraska bill, and by the decision of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case. In this case the court held that no negro slave, or descendant of such slave, could bring a suit for his freedom in the courts of the United States. The court decided also in this case that any citizen had a constitutional right to migrate to any territory with his slave property and hold slaves there. In order to make slavery a national instead of a local institution, Mr. Lincoln contended, it was only necessary for the people generally to fall into the habit of not caring whether slavery was voted down or voted up, and of acquiescing in the doctrine that negroes had no rights which they could enforce in the courts of law.

I happened to be on the platform with Mr. Lincoln, as a reporter, when this speech was delivered, and after the convention adjourned he handed me his manuscript and asked me to read the proof of it at the office of the *Illinois State Journal*, where it had already been put in type. He said to me that he had been urged by his friends in Springfield not to use the words, "this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free," because the phrase would be misinterpreted and misrepresented and would probably cause his defeat in the election, but that his mind was made up and he was determined to use those very words, because they were true and because the time had come to say so. He said he would rather be defeated in the election than keep silent or half silent any longer.

At this convention Lincoln was nominated for United States senator by the Republican party on the motion of Charles L. Wilson of the *Chicago Evening Journal*. It was not customary to nominate men for the Senate in this way. I think this was the first occasion on which such a nomination had been made by any political party. Wilson took this step without consultation with anybody, in order to put a stop to a rumor which had been put in circulation by the supporters of Douglas that if the Republicans should win the next legislature they would elect John Wentworth as senator. To put an end to this clap-trap Wilson made his motion in the convention, and it was adopted unanimously.

Douglas was a past-master of the art of political display and dazzle. He started on this campaign in the directors' car of the Illinois Central Railway and with a platform car attached, on which was mounted a brass cannon with a supply of ammunition to announce his arrival at the places where he was to speak. These conveniences were placed at his service by George B. McClellan, the vice-president of the road, afterward General McClellan. Douglas was accompanied also by the lady to whom he had been married two years earlier, formerly Miss Adèle Cutts, of Washington City, a grandniece of Dolly Madison. I saw her frequently during the campaign, and I never beheld a more queenly person. Her mere presence gained votes for her husband, without any effort of her own.

The first joint debate in pursuance of the agreement was at Ottawa, August 21. It took place in the open air, as did all the other debates. The state was now pretty well stirred up. Expectation was on tiptoe. The people within reaching distance of Ottawa by rail or by water or by wagon road were astir. Local committees on both sides had made the customary arrangements of processions on foot and on horseback, with banners and band wagons and

every kind of apparatus, including cannon, to announce the arrival of the champions. My own anticipations regarding the assemblage were high but the reality surpassed them. The sky was cloudless, but it had been very dry of late, so that the dust rose at every slight movement on the surface. I had early taken a position on elevated ground overlooking the town and surrounding country. Some hours before the time fixed for the speaking, clouds of dust began to rise on the horizon along the roads leading to the place, from all points of the compass, and these clouds became more frequent and more dense as the hours rolled on.

There were large wagons with four-horse teams for the accommodation of political clubs, heavily loaded and bearing canvas signs indicating their habitation and their political belonging. Long before the speakers and reporters ascended the platform, the public square where the meeting took place, and the avenues leading thereto, were densely packed with human beings, who had also swarmed upon the platform itself and its timber supports, and had filled the windows of all houses within earshot. The crowd was so dense that the speakers and their appointed escort had much difficulty in reaching their places and while they were doing so one corner of the platform gave way with its superincumbent population, but nobody was hurt. At all the other joint debates, except those of Jonesboro and Alton, which were in the part of Illinois called "Egypt," similar crowds and scenes were witnessed, the largest assemblage of all, according to my memoranda, being at Galesburg.

Douglas opened the debate with one hour at Ottawa. It was in his best style. He had a clarion voice and a smooth, compulsive, unhesitating flow of words, without ornament, going straight to the subject-matter with grace of manner and rapidity and ease of delivery which made it a

pleasure to listen to him. But this fluency covered many rocks and quicksands. He was gifted with the faculty of gliding deftly from one thing to another, turning the hearers' attention away from the real subject of debate so adroitly that the break would not be noticed, and presently the audience would be swimming in a new channel in company with him, not having missed the connection with the main theme. This skill in legerdemain constituted the chief part of Douglas' first hour at Ottawa, and the only part which need be noticed here. It related to Lincoln's saying that this government could not endure permanently half slave and half free. Why not? he asked. Didn't our fathers make it so? Didn't Washington and Jefferson, Franklin and Madison, Hamilton and Jay leave each state perfectly free to do as it pleased about slavery? Why could it not exist on the same principles still? "Suppose," he said, "this doctrine of uniformity *preached by Mr. Lincoln*, that the states *should* all be free or all slave, had prevailed, what would have been the result?" As there were then twelve slave-holding states and only one free state, slavery would have been fastened upon the whole thirteen. "If uniformity had been adopted when the government was established it must inevitably have been uniformity of slavery everywhere or else uniformity of negro citizenship and negro equality everywhere."

Here was the assumption adroitly introduced that Lincoln was "preaching" the doctrine of uniformity, and that uniformity meant that all states must be free or all slave, and that if all were free then negro equality must prevail everywhere. He went on to say that he did not question Mr. Lincoln's conscientious belief that the negro was made his equal and his brother, but for his own part he denied such equality and brotherhood altogether.

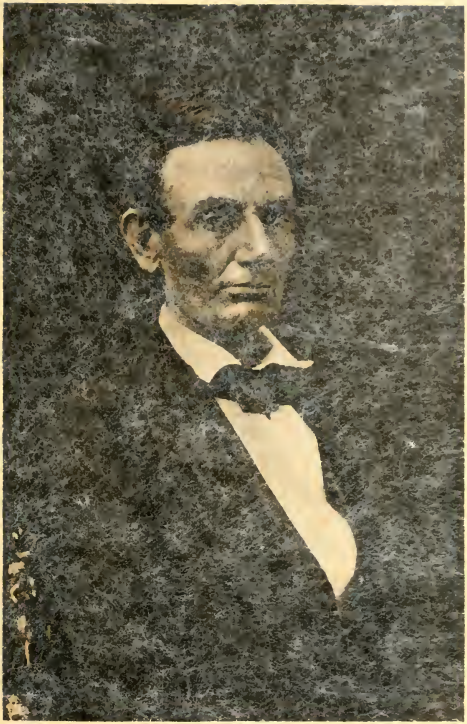
It perhaps occurred to him then that he was talking to an audience composed in large part of anti-slavery men. So he added these words:

> I do not hold that because the negro is our inferior therefore he ought to be a slave. By no means can such a conclusion be drawn from what I have said. On the contrary, I hold that humanity and Christianity both require that the negro shall have and enjoy every right, every privilege, and every immunity consistent with the safety of the society in which he lives. The question then arises what rights and privileges are consistent with the public good. This is a question which each state and each territory must decide for itself.

So this fine outburst of justice and generosity to the negro ended in the reaffirmance of the "sacred right of self-government," meaning that if A and B want to make slaves of C and D, no other person has the right to object.

Douglas concluded his half-hour with the expressed belief that if the new doctrine "preached by Lincoln," i.e., the doctrine of all one thing or all the other, should prevail, it would dissolve the Union.

Douglas ended in a whirlwind of applause and Lincoln began to speak in a slow and rather awkward way. He had a thin tenor, or rather falsetto, voice, almost as high-pitched as a boatswain's whistle. It could be heard farther and it had better wearing qualities than Douglas' rich baritone, but it was not so impressive to the listeners. Moreover, his words did not flow in a rushing, unbroken stream like Douglas'. He sometimes stopped for repairs before finishing a sentence, especially at the beginning of a speech. After getting fairly started, and lubricated, as it were, he went on without any noticeable hesitation, but he never had the ease and grace and finish of his adversary. Both his mind and his body worked more slowly than Douglas'. Nobody ever caught Douglas napping. He was quick as a flash to answer any question put to him in debate,



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Photograph by Alexander Hesler, Chicago; probably made in 1858.

and not infrequently his reply, although a manifest *non sequitur*, would be delivered with a wealth and overplus of words and an air of assurance, and pity for the ignorance of his questioner, quite confusing to the latter. Lincoln required time to gather himself in such emergencies, but he never failed to find his footing and to maintain it firmly when he had found it. What he lacked in mental agility and alertness he made up in moral superiority and blazing earnestness that came from his heart and went straight to those of his hearers.

As Lincoln had not preached any doctrine of all one thing or all the other, but had merely pointed out the tendency and logical consequence of the spread of slavery into new regions, it was easy for him to expose Douglas' sophistry and to show, as he said, that it was "a specious and fantastic arrangement of words by which a man can prove a horse chestnut to be a chestnut horse." And in regard to negro equality, it was not difficult to point out that Douglas had put civil rights and political and social privileges all in a mortar and brayed them together in such fashion that the several things could not be easily distinguished. After separating them and defining the various kinds of equality that might exist in mundane affairs he affirmed that, in the right to eat the bread that his own hand had earned, the negro was the equal of Judge Douglas and of every living man. This may seem now a very trivial matter, not worth recalling, but in fact Douglas never allowed Lincoln to drop it. He continued to charge him with the desire to bring about negro equality and amalgamation, to the end of the chapter.

Six days later the two champions met again at Freeport. This debate has become the most famous of the whole series by reason of a question which Lincoln put to Douglas and which the latter answered. Certain questions had been

put by Douglas to Lincoln at Ottawa which were not of much consequence in the long run, and when Lincoln answered them he claimed the right to ask an equal number in return. Among them was this: "Can the people of a United States territory, in any lawful way, against the wish of any citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of a state constitution?"

Douglas' Popular Sovereignty and his whole campaign were bottomed on the idea that the people of a territory could admit slavery, or exclude it, just as the majority might decide. But the southern people, particularly those of the Cotton States, had come by slow degrees to a different opinion. As long ago as 1848, William L. Yancey, of Alabama, who has been rightly styled the "orator of secession," laid down the doctrine that the people of a territory could not, prior to the formation of a state constitution, prevent any citizen of the United States from settling in such territory with his property, whether slave property or other. This doctrine had now received the sanction of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case.

On the evening before the Freeport debate Lincoln had a conference with some of his party friends at which the question was considered whether it would be wise to put the foregoing question to Douglas or not. All of the gentlemen present counseled him not to do so because Douglas would reply in the affirmative in order to save his election as senator.

It was Lincoln's opinion that Douglas was the only Democrat who could command sufficient strength in the North to be elected president in 1860, and that if he were not nominated the Republicans would win that fight. It was his opinion also that if Douglas should reply that the people of a territory *could* exclude slavery, the South would turn against him, and he could not get the nomination for

president in 1860 or any other time. So he decided to put the question, and when his friends still remonstrated, saying that he was throwing away the battle, he said: "I am after larger game; the battle of 1860 is worth a hundred of this." Of course, neither he nor anybody else then anticipated that the larger game of 1860 would be bagged by himself.

This was not the first time that Douglas had been confronted with this puzzling query. Senator Trumbull had put it to him in a debate in the Senate more than two years earlier, on the 9th of June, 1856. At that time, however, the Dred Scot decision had not been rendered. So Douglas replied that it was a judicial question and that he and all good Democrats would conform to the decision when it should be made. After the decision was made he conceived the idea of territorial unfriendliness as a means for keeping slavery out of a territory notwithstanding it had a legal right to go in, and he announced this doctrine, before the joint debates began, in two public speeches in Illinois, at one of which Lincoln himself was present.

Douglas' reply at Freeport was that, no matter what the Supreme Court might decide, the people of a territory could exclude slavery by failing to give it legal protection, or by enacting unfriendly legislation. "Slavery cannot exist a day or an hour anywhere," he said, "unless it is supported by local police regulations. . . . . Hence no matter what the decision of the Supreme Court may be on that abstract question, still the right of the people to make a slave territory or a free territory is perfect and complete under the Nebraska bill."

The next joint debate took place at Jonesboro, in "Lower Egypt." This was in a region where the Republican votes were so few that they were usually classified as "scattering." The audience was the smallest of the series, rather less than one thousand. Mr. Lincoln here took up Douglas' Freeport

speech and demolished it completely. He showed that it was not true that slavery could not exist unless supported by local police regulations, for in fact slavery always began without legislation and so continued until it became so extensive as to require legislation to regulate and support it. It began in this way in our own country in 1619. Dred Scott himself was held as a slave in Minnesota without any local police regulations. But if citizens had a constitutional right to take slaves into a territory and hold them there as property, the local legislature would be bound to afford them all needful protection, and failing to do so Congress would be bound to supply the deficiency. The logic of this position was unassailable. The only way that Douglas could reply was by likening slavery to liquor-selling, saying that if a man should take a stock of liquors to a territory, his right to sell it there would be subject to the local law and if that were unfriendly it would drive him out just as effectually as though there were a constitutional prohibition of liquor-selling. This was another example of his skill in juggling with words. If liquor-selling in territories were a *constitutional right* no territorial law could render that right nugatory.

Although Douglas' answer at Freeport blocked his road to the Charleston nomination, it saved him the senatorship. If he had said that the people of a territory could not, under the Dred Scott decision, keep slavery out of a territory, his whole fabric of Popular Sovereignty and sacred right of self-government would have fallen into ruin and he would have been buried immediately under the heap.

After the Freeport joint debate and before that of Jonesboro, we went to Carlinville, Macoupin County, where John M. Palmer divided the time with Mr. Lincoln. From this place we went to Clinton, DeWitt County, via Springfield and Decatur. During this journey an incident

occurred which gave unbounded mirth to Mr. Lincoln at my expense.

We left Springfield about nine o'clock in the evening for Decatur, where we were to change cars and take the north-bound train on the Illinois Central Railway. I was very tired and I curled myself up as best I could on the seat to take a nap, asking Mr. Lincoln to wake me up at Decatur, which he promised to do. I went to sleep, and when I did awake I had the sensation of having been asleep a long time. It was daylight and I knew that we should have reached Decatur before midnight. Mr. Lincoln's seat was vacant. While I was pulling myself together, the conductor opened the door of the car and shouted, "State Line!" This was the name of a shabby little town on the border of Indiana. There was nothing to do but to get out and wait for the next train going back to Decatur. About six o'clock in the evening I found my way to Clinton. The meeting was over, of course, and the *Chicago Tribune* had lost its expected report, and I was out of pocket for railroad fares. I wended my way to the house of Mr. C. H. Moore, where Mr. Lincoln was staying and where I too had been an expected guest. When Mr. Lincoln saw me coming up the garden path, his lungs began to crow like a chanticleer, and I thought he would laugh, *sans* intermission, an hour by his dial. He paused long enough to say that he also had fallen asleep and did not wake up till the train was starting *from* Decatur. He had very nearly been carried past the station himself, and, in his haste to get out, had forgotten all about his promise to waken me. Then he began to laugh again. The affair was so irresistibly funny, in his view, that he told the incident several times in Washington City when I chanced to meet him, after he became president, to any company who might be present, and with such contagious drollery that all who heard it would shake with laughter.

5 The Galesburg meeting came on October 7, the largest of the series in point of numbers in attendance. Douglas made the opening speech but it was only a repetition of his set speech about his doctrine of Popular Sovereignty and what he called Lincoln's doctrine of negro equality. Enlarging upon the odious features of the latter, he had something to say about Thomas Jefferson and the words used by Jefferson in writing the Declaration of Independence, "that all men are created equal," etc. He affirmed that as Jefferson was himself a slave-holder he never could have intended to include negroes in that phrase. This gave Lincoln the opportunity to unbosom himself on the subject of the Declaration of Independence, a theme that always brought out his best powers. The Declaration was to him as Holy Writ. He regarded it as the moral bedrock and foundation stone of our whole system of government. Nobody could question its sacredness in his presence without arousing his hot indignation. In reply to Douglas' remarks on this theme he said:

> I believe the entire records of the world, from the date of the Declaration of Independence up to within three years ago, may be searched in vain for one single affirmation from one single man that the negro was not included in the Declaration of Independence; I think I may defy Judge Douglas to show that he ever said so, that Washington ever said so, that any president ever said so, that any member of Congress ever said so, until the necessities of the Democratic party in regard to slavery had to invent that affirmation. And I will remind Judge Douglas and this audience that while Mr. Jefferson was the owner of slaves, as undoubtedly he was, in speaking upon this very subject he used the strong language that he trembled for his country when he remembered that God was just; and I will offer the highest premium in my power to Judge Douglas if he will show that he, in all his life, ever uttered a sentiment at all akin to that of Jefferson.

6 The next meeting was at Quincy, October 13. Here Mr. Lincoln had the opening and he employed it in showing

what were the true issues of the campaign. The fundamental difference between parties arose from the fact that domestic slavery existed in the land and that it was a disturbing element, leading to controversy between persons who thought that slavery was wrong and others who did not think it wrong. Those who thought it was evil and a disturbing element and a breeder of controversy were bound to use their influence and their votes in such ways as to prevent it from increasing and overspreading new territories and thereby becoming more harmful and disturbing than before. He enlarged upon this theme, constructing a masterly argument in support of the Republican party, which was then only two years old, and had taken part in only one presidential contest. He did not, however, indulge in any offensive language toward the southern people. His allusions to them were generally in terms implying that they were the product and the victims of a bad social system, not the architects and designers of it.

When Douglas made his reply he said that if we would all mind our own business and let our neighbors alone this Republic could exist forever divided into free and slave states; which gave Lincoln the opportunity to thank him for his public announcement that his political theories contemplated that slavery should last forever.

The last debate took place at Alton, October 15. At this meeting Douglas' voice was scarcely audible. It was worn out by incessant speaking, not at the seven joint debates only, but at nearly a hundred separate meetings. At Alton he was so hoarse that he could not be distinctly heard more than twenty feet from the platform. Yet he maintained the same resolute bearing, the same look of calm self-confidence that he had shown at the beginning. Lincoln's voice was not in the least impaired although he had made as many speeches additional to the joint debates as Douglas had.

One instance of Lincoln's drollery comes to my mind connected with the Alton debate. Douglas had the opening speech here. Lincoln was occupying a seat in the rear of the platform. His next neighbor was a young lady friend with whom he had been engaged in conversation before the debate began. He was holding in his lap a linen overgarment to protect himself from the dust. When Douglas had finished his opening speech Lincoln rose and handed his linen duster to the young lady and said in a low tone of voice: "Now hold my coat while I stone Stephen."

The Alton debate was a general summing-up of issues on the part of both speakers. The only noticeable feature was the following paragraph from Lincoln:

> This is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles—right and wrong—throughout the world. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity, the other the divine right of kings. It is the same spirit in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit that says,' 'You toil and work and earn bread, and I'll eat it." No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labor or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle.

I was present at most of Mr. Lincoln's separate meetings as well as at all of the joint debates, as reporter and correspondent of the *Chicago Press and Tribune*, and I was struck with admiration and wonder that Lincoln hardly ever repeated himself. Each speech, no matter how small the audience, seemed to be a new one, although the pabulum was the same and some particular phrases were in frequent use. I once asked him how he could find fresh material day after day, while Douglas' habit was to repeat the same speech at

his small meetings everywhere. He said that for his own part he could not repeat a speech the second time although he might make one bearing some similarity to a former one. The subject with which he was charged was crowding for utterance all the time; it was always enlarging as he went on from place to place. He said that Douglas was not lacking in versatility, but that he had formed a theory that the speech which he was delivering at his small meetings was the one best adapted to secure votes and since the voters at one meeting would not be likely to hear him at any other, they would never know that he was repeating himself, or, if they did know, they would probably think that it was the proper thing to do.

I traveled many days with Mr. Lincoln in all sorts of conveyances, when he had no other companion. At such times we engaged in conversation mostly on the subject with which his mind was occupied, connected with the campaign, and he talked to me with the same freedom and seriousness as he would have talked with a person of his own age and experience. At the country taverns where we stopped over night there was always a roomful, or houseful, of warm friends and eager listeners, with whom the conversation, interspersed with mirth, was continued for hours together. Lincoln as a story-teller was the most humorous being I ever knew. His stories were not told for the purpose of causing merriment but to illustrate the subject of the conversation, whatever it might be. His manner of telling such stories was irresistible and inimitable. He would entertain a roomful of people in this way till their sides ached with laughter. It was customary then in country taverns for two men to occupy the same room at night, either as a matter of necessity or as a matter of economy, and thus I slept in the same room with Mr. Lincoln several times.

In all my journeyings with him I never heard any person call him "Abe," not even his partner, Herndon. There was an impalpable garment of dignity about him which forbade such familiarity. I have read pretended conversations with him in books and newspapers where his interlocutors addressed him as Abe this and Abe that, but I am sure that all such colloquies are imaginary.

Douglas does not make a very engaging picture in the seven joint debates, but he won the victory according to the rules of the game. His friends carried the legislature by a majority of three in the Senate and five in the House, although Lincoln's friends had a plurality of 4,191 in the popular vote. The districting of the state was unduly favorable to the Democrats. The result was bitterly lamented by the Republicans and by none more so than myself, but looking back upon it now it seems to me that Providence directed events better than we could have done, for if Douglas had been defeated his prestige would have been shattered, and he would not have had sufficient strength in the Charleston convention to split the Democratic party in twain, whereby a Republican victory was made certain in 1860. Moreover, if Lincoln had been elected senator he would probably not have been nominated for President in 1860.

In reviewing this political encounter I have sketched only the salient points of the campaign, those which must remain a part of our country's history. After reading again the whole of these seven joint debates I am more than ever convinced that Lincoln's speeches will take a place among our American classics, not merely by reason of the cause for which he contended, and the mighty events which they foreshadowed, but also for their literary quality. We find here the same felicity that marked the papers and messages and speeches that he gave us during his presidency, includ-

ing the Gettysburg address and the second inaugural. This felicity of expression is all the more remarkable when we reflect that the speeches were extemporaneous and were delivered in the open air, in the midst of noise, confusion, and various interruptions. All of those speeches as transcribed by the shorthand reporter, Robert R. Hitt (afterward congressman), passed through my hands, and none other, before they went to the printers, and they underwent no alteration except in a few cases where the wind, or some disorder on the platform, caused a slight hiatus in the stenographer's notes.

I need not add that Douglas was outclassed in these debates, although he won the prize for which the debaters were contending. His day of true glory came later. When the secessionists fired on Fort Sumter, he ranged himself on the side of Lincoln and came to Illinois to hold the state true to the Union. This was the occasion of his last and greatest effort. The state legislature, then in session, invited him to address them on the existing crisis and he responded on the 25th of April. I was one of the listeners to that speech and I cannot conceive that Demosthenes, or Mirabeau, or Patrick Henry, or any orator of ancient or modern times could have surpassed it. Nobody can form an estimate of its power by merely reading it. Its chief feature was its tremendous earnestness. It was an outburst of passion, perspiration, and patriotism raised to the *n*th degree. If the roof of the building had been carried away by the tempest that was issuing from the Little Giant none of his listeners would have been surprised. At that time southern Illinois was hanging in the balance regarding the question of sustaining Lincoln in the policy of coercing the seceding states. Lying between Kentucky and Missouri, its people held substantially the same political views and prejudices as theirs. Douglas was the only man who

could have held them solid for the Union. The southern counties now followed him as faithfully as they had followed him in previous years and sent their sons into the field to fight for the Union as numerously and bravely as any other section of the state or of the Union. His influence was also potent in the border states, Kentucky and Missouri, both of which refused to join the Southern Confederacy and sent large reinforcements to the Union armies.

Douglas had only a few more days to live. He was now forty-eight years of age, but if he had lived forty-eight years longer he never could have surpassed that eloquence, or exceeded that service to his country, for he never could have found another like occasion to call out his astounding powers. He died at Chicago, June 3, 1861. I have a tender memory for him. His great competitor, however, will always wear the laurel of the joint debates. "Thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just!"

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